Understanding AIDS

A Message From The Surgeon General

This brochure has been sent to you by the Government of the United States. In preparing it, we have consulted with the top health experts in the country.

I feel it is important that you have the best information now available for fighting the AIDS virus, a health problem that the President has called "Public Enemy Number One."

Stopping AIDS is up to you, your family and your loved ones.

Some of the issues involved in this brochure may not be things you are used to discussing openly. I can easily understand that. But now you must discuss them. We all must know about AIDS. Read this brochure and talk about it with those you love. Get involved. Many schools, churches, synagogues, and community groups offer AIDS education activities.

I encourage you to practice responsible behavior based on understanding and strong personal values. This is what you can do to stop AIDS.

C. Everett Koop, M.D., Sc.D.
Surgeon General

Este folleto sobre el SIDA se publica en Español.
Para solicitar una copia, llame al 1-800-344-SIDA.

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What AIDS Means To You

AIDS is one of the most serious health problems that has ever faced the American public. It is important that we all, regardless of who we are, understand this disease.

AIDS stands for *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.* It is a disease caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, HIV—the AIDS virus.

The AIDS virus may live in the human body for years before actual symptoms appear. It primarily affects you by making you unable to fight other diseases. These other diseases can kill you.

Many people feel that only certain "high risk groups" of people are infected by the AIDS virus. This is untrue. *Who you are has nothing to do with whether you are in danger of being infected with the AIDS virus. What matters is what you do.*

People are worried about getting AIDS. Some should be worried and need to take some serious precautions. But many are not in danger of contracting AIDS.

The purpose of this brochure is to tell you how you can, and just as important, how you can't become infected with the AIDS virus.

Your children need to know about AIDS. Discuss it with them as you would any health concern.

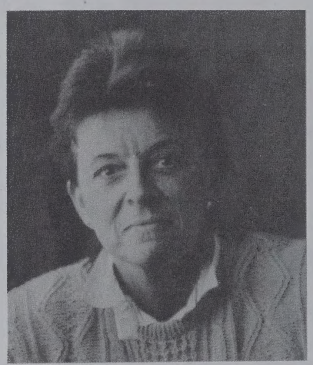
How Do You Get AIDS?

There are two main ways you can get AIDS. First, you can become infected by having sex—oral, anal or vaginal—with someone who is infected with the AIDS virus.

Second, you can be infected by sharing drug needles and syringes with an infected person.

Babies of women who have been infected with the AIDS virus may be born with the infection because it can be transmitted from the mother to the baby before or during birth.

In addition, some persons with hemophilia and others have been infected by receiving blood *(see page 3).*



"Obviously women can get AIDS. I'm here to witness to that. AIDS is not a 'we,' 'they' disease, it's an 'us' disease."

— Carole has AIDS

Can You Become Infected?

Yes, if you engage in risky behavior.

The male homosexual population was the first in this country to feel the effects of the disease. But in spite of what you may have heard, the number of heterosexual cases is growing.

People who have died of AIDS in the U.S. have been male and female, rich and poor, white, Black, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian.

How Do You Get AIDS From Sex?

The AIDS virus can be spread by sexual intercourse whether you are male or female, heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual.

This happens because a person infected with the AIDS virus may have the virus in semen or vaginal fluids. The virus can enter the body through the vagina, penis, rectum or mouth.

Anal intercourse, with or without a condom, is risky. The rectum is easily injured during anal intercourse.

Remember, AIDS is sexually transmitted, and the AIDS virus is not the only infection that is passed through intimate sexual contact.

Other sexually transmitted diseases, such as gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes and chlamydia, can also be contracted through oral, anal and vaginal intercourse. If you are infected with one of these diseases and engage in risky behavior *(see page 3),* you are at greater risk of getting AIDS.

You Won't Get AIDS From Insects—Or A Kiss

No matter what you may have heard, the AIDS virus is hard to get and is easily avoided.

You won't just "catch" AIDS like a cold or flu because the virus is a different type. The AIDS virus is transmitted through sexual intercourse, the sharing of drug needles, or to babies of infected mothers before or during birth.

You won't get the AIDS virus through everyday contact with the people around you in school, in the workplace, at parties, child care centers, or stores. You won't get it by swimming in a pool, even if someone in the pool is infected with the AIDS virus. Students attending school with someone infected with the AIDS virus are not in danger from casual contact.

You won't get AIDS from a mosquito bite. The AIDS virus is not transmitted through a mosquito's salivary glands like other diseases such as malaria or yellow fever. You won't get it from bed bugs, lice, flies or other insects, either.

You won't get AIDS from saliva, sweat, tears, urine or a bowel movement.

You won't get AIDS from a kiss.

You won't get AIDS from clothes, a telephone, or from a toilet seat. It can't be passed by using a glass or eating utensils that someone else has used. You won't get the virus by being on a bus, train or crowded elevator with a person who is infected with the virus, or who has AIDS.

The Difference Between Giving And Receiving Blood

1. Giving blood. You are not now, nor have you ever been in danger of getting AIDS from giving blood at a blood bank. The needles that are used for blood donations are brand-new. Once they are used, they are destroyed. There is no way you can come into contact with the AIDS virus by donating blood.

2. Receiving blood. The risk of getting AIDS from a blood transfusion has been greatly reduced. In the interest of making the blood supply as safe as possible, donors are screened for risk factors and donated blood is tested for the AIDS antibody. Call your local blood bank if you have questions.

What Behavior Puts You At Risk?

You are at risk of being infected with the AIDS virus if you have sex with someone who is infected, or if you share drug needles and syringes with someone who is infected.

Since you can't be sure who is infected, your chances of coming into contact with the virus increase with the number of sex partners you have. Any exchange of infected blood, semen or vaginal fluids can spread the virus and place you at great risk.

The following behaviors are risky when performed with an infected person. You can't tell by looking if a person is infected.

RISKY BEHAVIOR

Sharing drug needles and syringes.

Anal sex, with or without a condom.

Vaginal or oral sex with someone who shoots drugs or engages in anal sex.

Sex with someone you don't know well (a pickup or prostitute) or with someone you know has several sex partners.

Unprotected sex (without a condom) with an infected person.

SAFE BEHAVIOR

Not having sex.

Sex with one mutually faithful, uninfected partner.

Not shooting drugs.

What About Dating?

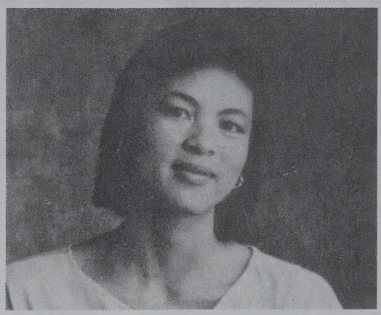
Dating and getting to know other people is a normal part of life. Dating doesn't mean the same thing as having sex. Sexual intercourse as a part of dating can be risky. One of the risks is AIDS.

How can you tell if someone you're dating or would like to date has been exposed to the AIDS virus? The bad news is, you can't. But the good news is, as long as sexual activity and sharing drug needles are avoided, it doesn't matter.

You are going to have to be careful about the person you become sexually involved with, making your own decision based on your own best judgment. That can be difficult.

Has this person had any sexually transmitted diseases? How many people have they been to bed with? Have they experimented with drugs? All these are sensitive, but important, questions. But you have a personal responsibility to ask.

Think of it this way. If you know someone well enough to have sex, then you should be able to talk about AIDS. If someone is unwilling to talk, you shouldn't have sex.



"Talk to your teenagers about AIDS. It is primarily a sexually transmitted disease. So if you're going to talk about AIDS, there's no way you can avoid talking about sex."

— Sally Jue
AIDS Counselor

Do Married People Get AIDS?

Married people who are uninfected, faithful and don't shoot drugs are not at risk. But if they engage in risky behavior *(see page 3)*, they can become infected with the AIDS virus and infect their partners. If you feel your spouse may be putting you at risk, talk to him or her. It's your life.

What Is All The Talk About Condoms?

Not so very long ago, condoms (rubbers or prophylactics) were things we didn't talk about very much.

Now, they're discussed on the evening news and on the front page of your newspaper, and displayed out in the open in your local drugstore, grocery, and convenience store.

For those who are sexually active and not limiting their sexual activity to one partner, condoms have been shown to help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. That is why the use of condoms is recommended to help reduce the spread of AIDS.

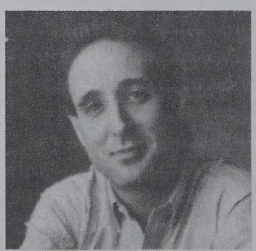
Condoms are the best preventive measure against AIDS besides not having sex and practicing safe behavior *(see page 3)*.

But condoms are far from being foolproof. You have to use them properly. And you have to use them every time you have sex, from start to finish. If you use a condom, you should remember these guidelines:

(1) Use condoms made of latex rubber. Latex serves as a barrier to the virus. "Lambskin" or "natural membrane" condoms are not as good because of the pores in the material. Look for the word "latex" on the package.

(2) A condom with a spermicide may provide additional protection. Spermicides have been shown in laboratory tests to kill the virus. Use the spermicide in the tip and outside the condom.

(3) Condom use is safer with a lubricant. Check the list of ingredients on the back of the lubricant package to make sure the lubricant is water-based. Do not use petroleum-based jelly, cold cream, baby oil or cooking shortening. These can weaken the condom and cause it to break.



"Condoms can be most effective when they are used correctly, and there is a right way and a wrong way to use one. Always use a latex condom."

— Drew Sisselman
AIDS Volunteer

What Does Someone With AIDS Look Like?

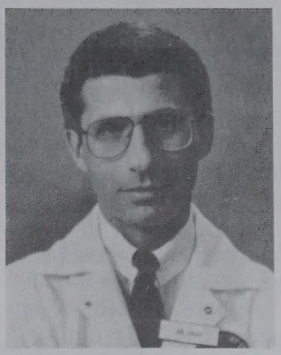
It is very important that everyone understands that a person can be infected with the AIDS virus without showing any symptoms at all.

It is possible to be infected for years, feel fine, look fine and have no way of knowing you are infected unless you have a test for the AIDS virus.

During this period, however, people infected with the AIDS virus can pass the virus to sexual partners, to people with whom drug needles are shared, and to children before or during birth. That is one of the most disturbing things about AIDS.

Once symptoms do appear, they are similar to the symptoms of some other diseases. As the disease progresses, they become more serious. That is because the AIDS virus keeps your body's natural defenses from operating correctly.

If you are concerned whether you might be infected, consider your own behavior and its effects on others. If you feel you need to be tested for the AIDS virus, talk to a doctor or an AIDS counselor for more information. *(See below.)*



"You can't tell if someone has been infected by the AIDS virus by looking at him or her. But you aren't in danger of getting the disease unless you engage in risky behavior with someone who is infected."

—Anthony S. Fauci, M.D.
Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and Coordinator of the National Institutes of Health AIDS Research

Is There A Cure For AIDS?

There is presently no cure for AIDS.

Medicines such as AZT have prolonged the lives of some people with AIDS. There is hope that additional treatments will be found.

There is also no vaccine to prevent uninfected people from getting the infection. Researchers believe it may take years for an effective, safe vaccine to be found.

The most effective way to prevent AIDS is avoiding exposure to the virus, which you can control by your own behavior.

Should You Get An AIDS Test?

You have probably heard about the "AIDS Test." The test doesn't actually tell you if you have AIDS. It shows if you have been infected with the virus. It looks for changes in blood that occur after you have been infected.

The Public Health Service recommends you be confidentially counseled and tested if you have had any sexually transmitted disease or shared needles; if you are a man who has had sex with another man; or if you have had sex with a prostitute, male or female. You should be tested if you have had sex with anyone who has done any of these things.

If you are a woman who has been engaging in risky behavior *(see page 3)*, and you plan to have a baby or are not using birth control, you should be tested.

Your doctor may advise you to be counseled and tested if you are a hemophiliac, or have received a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.

If you test positive, and find you have been infected with the AIDS virus, you must take steps to protect your partner.

People who have always practiced safe behavior *(see page 3)* do not need to be tested.

There's been a great deal in the press about problems with the test. It is very reliable if it is done by a good laboratory and the results are checked by a physician or counselor.

If you have engaged in risky behavior, speak frankly to a doctor who understands the AIDS problem, or to an AIDS counselor.

For more information, call your local public health agency. They're listed in the government section of your phone book. Or, call your local AIDS hotline. If you can't find the number, call 1-800-342-AIDS.

The Problem Of Drugs And AIDS

Today, in some cities, the sharing of drug needles and syringes by those who shoot drugs is the fastest growing way that the virus is being spread.

No one should shoot drugs. It can result in addiction, poor health, family disruption, emotional disturbances and death. Many drug users are addicted and need to enter a drug treatment program as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, these people must avoid AIDS by not sharing any of the equipment used to prepare and inject illegal drugs.

Sharing drug needles, even once, is an extremely easy way to be infected with the AIDS virus. Blood from an infected person can be trapped in the needle or syringe, and then injected directly into the bloodstream of the next person who uses the needle.

Other kinds of drugs, including alcohol, can also cause problems. Under their influence, your judgment becomes impaired. You could be exposed to the AIDS virus while doing things you wouldn't otherwise do.

Teenagers are at an age when trying different things is especially inviting. They must understand how serious the drug problem is and how to avoid it.

Drugs are also one of the main ways in which prostitutes become infected. They may share needles themselves or have sex with people who do. They then can pass the AIDS virus to others.

For information about drug abuse treatment programs, contact your physician, local public health agency or community AIDS or drug assistance group.

AIDS And Babies

An infected woman can give the AIDS virus to her baby before it is born, or during birth. If a woman is infected, her child has about one chance in two of being born with the virus.

If you are considering having a baby, and think you might have been at risk of being infected with the AIDS virus, even if it was years ago, you should receive counseling and be tested before you get pregnant.

"One of the misconceptions about AIDS is that it only affects gay men. That's not true. AIDS affects everyone, men, women, and children!"

– Suki Ports
Minority AIDS Project

You must have a long talk with the person with whom you're planning to have a child. Even if you have known this person for a long time, there's no way to be sure he or she hasn't been infected in the past, possibly without realizing it. That person needs to think hard and decide if an AIDS test might be a good idea. So should you.

Talking With Kids About AIDS

Children hear about AIDS, just as we all do. But they don't understand it, so they become frightened. They are worried they or their friends might get sick and die.

Children need to be told they can't get AIDS from everyday contact in the classroom, cafeteria or bathrooms. They don't have to worry about getting AIDS even if one of their schoolmates is infected.

Basic health education should be started as early as possible, in keeping with parental and community standards. Local schools have the responsibility to see that their students know the facts about AIDS. It is very important that middle school students — those entering their teens — learn to protect themselves from the AIDS virus.

Children must also be taught values and responsibility, as well as skills to help them resist peer pressure that might lead to risky behavior. These skills can be reinforced by religious and community groups. However, final responsibility rests with the parents. As a parent, you should read and discuss this brochure with your children.

Helping A Person With AIDS

If you are one of the growing number of people who know someone who is infected, you need to have a special understanding of the problem.

No one will require more support and more love than your friend with AIDS. Feel free to offer what you can, without fear of becoming infected.

Don't worry about getting AIDS from everyday contact with a person with AIDS. You need to take precautions such as wearing rubber gloves only when blood is present.

If you don't know anyone with AIDS, but you'd still like to offer a helping hand, become a volunteer. You can be sure your help will be appreciated by a person with AIDS.

This might mean dropping by the supermarket to pick up groceries, sitting with the person a while, or just being there to talk. You may even want to enroll in a support group for caregivers. These are available around the country. If you are interested, contact any local AIDS-related organization.

Above all, keep an upbeat attitude. It will help you and everyone face the disease more comfortably.

"If you want more information about AIDS or what you can do to help, contact your physician, community organizations in your area, or the local public health agency."

—James O. Mason, M.D.
Director, Centers for Disease Control

Do You Know Enough To Talk About AIDS? Try This Quiz

It's important for each of us to share what we know about AIDS with family members and others we love. Knowledge and understanding are the best weapons we have against the disease. Check the boxes. Answers below.

1. If you are not in a "high risk group," you still need to be concerned about AIDS.
   ☐ True ☐ False

2. The AIDS virus is not spread through
   ☐ A. insect bites.
   ☐ B. casual contact.
   ☐ C. sharing drug needles.
   ☐ D. sexual intercourse.

3. Condoms are an effective, but not foolproof, way to prevent the spread of the AIDS virus.
   ☐ True ☐ False

4. You can't tell by looking that someone has the AIDS virus.
   ☐ True ☐ False

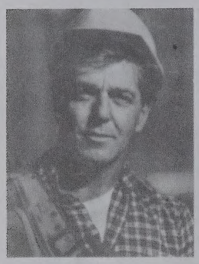
5. If you think you've been exposed to the AIDS virus, you should get an AIDS test.
   ☐ True ☐ False

6. People who provide help for someone with AIDS are not personally at risk for getting the disease.
   ☐ True ☐ False

ANSWERS

1. True. It is risky *behavior* that puts you at risk for AIDS, regardless of any "group" you belong to. *See page 2.*
2. A & B. The AIDS virus is not spread by insects, kissing, tears, or casual contact. *See page 3.*
3. True. However, the most effective preventive measure against AIDS is not having sex or shooting drugs. *Condoms are discussed in detail on page 4.*
4. True. You cannot tell by looking if someone is infected. The virus by itself is completely invisible. Symptoms may first appear years after you have been infected. *See page 5.*
5. True. You should be counseled about getting an AIDS test if you have been engaging in risky behavior or think you have been exposed to the virus. There is no reason to be tested if you don't engage in this behavior. *See page 5.*
6. True. You won't get AIDS by helping someone who has the disease. *See page 7.*

Understanding AIDS

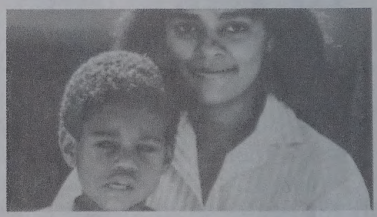


What Do You Really Know About AIDS?

Are You At Risk?

AIDS And Sex

Why No One Has Gotten AIDS From Mosquitoes



OTIS R. BOWEN, M.D.,
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

AMERICA RESPONDS TO AIDS
CDC

ROBERT E. WINDOM, M.D.,
Assistant Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

This brochure has been prepared by the Surgeon General and the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Public Health Service. The Centers for Disease Control is the government agency responsible for the prevention and control of diseases, including AIDS, in the United States.

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